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Racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related forms of intolerance, follow-up and implementation of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action

Written statement* submitted by the Organization for Defending Victims of Violence, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[15 February 2015]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

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Xenophobia: Rise in Islamophobia

The recent terror attacks in France cannot be justified for any reason whatsoever. Killing of innocent people no matter under what circumstances is without a doubt condemnable.

The roots of today's hardline Islamic extremism can be traced back to the 1990s with the turning of Al-Qaeda against its original ally and sponsor the United States of America. The 1993 World Trade Centre bombing, the 1998 bombings of US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, and the suicide attack on USS Cole, are all proofs to the claim.

The turning point in the fight against this new more dangerous and ruthless phenomenon was September 11, 2001 in which almost 3000 people lost their lives in North Eastern United States.

The ensuing war against Taliban in Afghanistan and the 2003 invasion of Iraq on the pretext of WMD, has arguably done little to prevent the rise of Religious extremism, although the Taliban were overthrown and were degraded notably alongside Al-Qaeda, in recent years we have witnessed a surge in their comeback, and now we see breakaway offshoots of Al-Qaeda such as IS, which even Al-Qaeda has criticized its methods.

With the Arab spring's disastrous failures in some countries and successes in others, the geopolitical situation of the MENA region has been thrown into turmoil. The sectarian violence in Libya has forced the government and parliament to flee from the capital to Tobruk, and in Syria a bloody conflict has been raging for over three years with over 250,000 people killed.

The conflict in Syria and Iraq has attracted Western born and raised extremists to go to the region and join the fight, from the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Belgium and other European countries and even the United States. These young people become radicalized and battle hardened witnessing and even at times carrying out brutal killings, and upon their return to their home countries they feel even more isolated and hatred towards the West.
The Toulouse, Belgium and Paris attacks over the recent months were conducted by second or third generation children of North African Immigrants. The question that must be asked is what drives these young men and women towards radicalism.

These individuals feel marginalized by society and their governments, they have poor education, are either unemployed or not holding steady jobs, and most of them have had a brush with the law for petty crimes.

Another cause for the recruitment of this vulnerable group of society is the Jihadi internet websites and some extremist imams.

All the abovementioned has increased and spread the feeling of Xenophobia and Islamophobia among western nations. Extremist far right groups which prior to 9/11 were fast losing popularity and support have now found themselves becoming more popular winning seats in national assemblies and even the European Parliament.

Over the last ten years religious extremism, some European newspapers and magazines started publishing cartoons of the Prophet of Islam, Mohammad. And in Holland the descendant of Vincent Van Gogh made a documentary on the alleged treatment of women in Islam. Subsequently Theo Van Gogh was murdered by a man of North African descent who claimed he did it for the defense of Islam. The publication and republication of cartoons by other European papers led to mass protests in most Islamic countries.

Religious extremism in all religions and forms are strongly condemnable. Boko Haram continues to commit heinous crimes in Nigeria in the name of Islam, an Islam which is not the true Islam which has a following of over 1.5 billion people on Earth. And to prove the point that the majority of Muslims care for their fellow human beings no matter what race or religion, we remind that the staff member who saved some people in the Jewish Kosher supermarket by hiding them in a freezer was a Muslim from Mali.

Articles 18 and 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights reaffirm freedom of religion and freedom of expression respectively, article 19 3(a) of the ICCPR however goes further on calling for "respect of the rights and reputation of others."

In March 2009 the Human Rights Council adopted Resolution 7/19 on Combating Defamation of Religion, sadly however this resolution is not binding.

Freedom of expression is never absolute, not even in the most democratic and liberal countries. No matter where you are; you cannot scream "fire" in a packed movie theatre, because of the panic and the stampede and possible injuries that it will cause.

The Organization for Defending Victims of Violence (ODVV) strongly condemns the hijacking of religion for sick and twisted political agenda by terrorists. These terrorists are not real Muslims. Real Islam does not preach barbarity. It preaches peaceful coexistence and tolerance.

Freedom of expression cannot be absolute. Insulting and defamation of any religion is morally wrong. While expressing its deepest sympathies to the families of the victims of the Paris terrorist attack, the ODVV also regrets the publication of the Prophet of Islam's cartoon on the front page of the Charlie Hebdo's first issue following the attack.

Authors and editors in the West must seriously consider the consequences of their actions in the world of Islam. The ensuring protests some of which led to violence, death and destruction of religious places of worship (Niger) in some Muslim countries should be on the conscience of these editors.

As always, the ODVV insists on an international forum to be held on Dialogue and Understanding among Religions. The ODVV and other Iranian sister NGOs are ready, willing and capable in assisting the holding of such venue. Education after leaving the family, is an important part of the things that makes us become human beings in adulthood. It is necessary for children to learn and understand other cultures and religions, and education boards in all countries should design special classes in schools just for that.

Mutual respect between minorities and majorities is key for multiculturalism to work. At the same time Western countries must respect the culture and religion of their minorities and not forcefully make them change their way of life. Mutual respect and understanding must take place.